

The Bible and History



SABBATH—FEBRUARY 25

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Psalm 104:1–9; Revelation 1:1–3; 2 Peter 1:21; Daniel 2; Revelation 12:7–17; Romans 16:20; 2 Corinthians 5:17–19.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘I am the Alpha [Beginning] and the Omega [End], the First and the Last,’ says the Lord God. ‘I am the One who is, and who was, and who will come. I am the Mighty One’ ” (Revelation 1:8, NIV).

KEY (IMPORTANT) THOUGHT: Our God works in and through history. And in and through history He has given us powerful proof for faith.

IS HUMAN HISTORY A SERIES OF EVENTS THAT MEAN NOTHING? Or is there a central direction toward a certain goal, all according to a plan? The Bible makes it clear that God directs history and shows Himself in it.

But not all history shows God's will. People are free to make bad choices. Many of these bad choices influence history. Just because God works through history does not mean He causes all that happens. Evil things happen. But God is still there. He works out His will, and He will bring human history to a great and glorious (wonderful) close.

Many Christians believe that God led Bible writers to write down the most important events in human history. God often gives the interpretation of these events so that we can understand what they mean.

This week we will study a little of how God has worked in and through world history.

SUNDAY—FEBRUARY 26**THE PAST AND THE FUTURE
(2 Peter 1:21)**

Some people argue that human events go in circles like the rest of nature. These circles move endlessly from birth and growth to decay and death in a series that does not have a beginning or an end.

But this is not the truth. The fact is that human life runs in a line, not in a circle. The Bible says that time is a one-way street.

What do Bible writers say about human history's beginning and end? Read Genesis 1:1; Job 38:1–7; Psalm 104:1–9; Revelation 1:1–3, 19; and Revelation 21:1–6.

Human history does not go in circles. It has a real beginning. It faces a glorious future. Human history has a point, a goal. Normally you cannot be sure what the point of a story is until you have reached the end. There always can be surprises at the end. And in the best stories there are surprises. Then how can we know the point of human history? In our case, we know because God has shown His plan to us through the prophets (special messengers).

Our Lord knows the future. So, He knows all the possible choices that humans can and will freely make. And He has told us how it will turn out in the end, no matter what choices we make in the meantime.

How is God's plan for the future given to us, according to 2 Peter 1:21?

If we trust the Word of God, we can know that the Lord knows the end and has shown it to us. He is the God of the past and the present. He also is the Lord of the future. So, we can trust that the future will come as He has said it would.

How easy is it to foretell the future? How often have you gotten it wrong? The good news is that God knows the future and knows all that will happen. How does it give you comfort to know that a God of love knows about all that comes our way?



The Bible says that time is a one-way street.

MONDAY—FEBRUARY 27**THE PROPHETS AS HISTORIANS
(Jeremiah 1:14–19)**

All through the Bible, the prophets use the words, “The word of the Lord” or “Thus says the Lord.” In short, what

they are saying is, I am not speaking these truths to you. It is God speaking them through me. So, be ready to listen.

How is this idea shown in Jeremiah 1:14–19?

In these verses, Jerusalem is about to be given over to Babylon. This event is in fulfillment of God's prophecy (special message) of what would happen to the Israelites if they turned away from Him and worshiped other gods.

Human kings rarely believe that history works this way. They believe that their decisions influence public life for all time. They think that they are in control. But Jeremiah (and other prophets) shows that this belief is not true. Israel's rulers discover that the nation's history is leading Israel toward destruction. The book of Jeremiah is a shocking reminder of the power of God's Word as it is fulfilled in historical events.

How do Isaiah 14:24–27 and Nahum 1:5–10 remind us of this truth about the power of God's Word?

This endless power of God shown in human history is also shown in nature. For example, Psalm 104 describes nature not as self-operating (with its own laws) but as obeying God's commands at every moment. The Bible does not show God as having created the world and then leaving it on

its own under the complete control of natural laws. Natural laws certainly are part of how God keeps the world going. But all those laws are there only because He created them and keeps them going.

Many scientists declare that the world began by accident and that it will end that way too. Why, deep down, do you know that these statements cannot be right?



Nature obeys God's commands at every moment.

TUESDAY—FEBRUARY 28

DANIEL 2 AND GOD'S LEADING IN HISTORY (Daniel 2)

In the 1700s, a Frenchman, who was an atheist,¹ believed that everything in the universe was preplanned by natural laws. So, if someone knew all these natural laws and what they meant, then that person could know everything that would happen.

Of course, humans do have free will,

1. atheist—a person who does not believe that there is a God.

or free choice. God made us that way. As humans who can love, we had to be given free choice. This is because love that is forced cannot be love. To give us the ability to love, God had to make us free. But God's power is so great that, even with humans having free will, He knows the future perfectly. It does not matter what free choices we make.

Study again the prophecy of Daniel 2. In what ways is this one chapter powerful proof that God knows the future, and far in advance, too?

This chapter was written more than twenty-six hundred years ago. And history has happened exactly as God showed it. In a way, this prophecy should be more meaningful for us today than for those who lived thousands of years ago. And that is because today we are looking back at history and can see exactly how these empires came and went, just as the prophecy foretold. Suppose you had read this prophecy during the time of Media-Persia when this chapter was first written. Then you would not have seen the rise and fall of the empires that came after. But today, looking back, we can see much more than someone from long ago could see. So, the prophecy holds a power for us that those in the past could not appreciate.

And the surprising thing is that millions of people, all with free will, have lived during the long time periods shown in Daniel 2. But the Lord knew

exactly what was going to happen, what kingdoms would rise and fall. And He knew it way in advance too.

The prophet Daniel was right about the rise and fall of all those kingdoms: Babylon, Media-Persia, Greece, and Rome, including the breakup of Rome into smaller powers that still remain today. From where we stand in history, the only kingdom left is the last one, God's eternal kingdom (Daniel 2:44). If he was right about all the ones so far, how foolish would it be to not trust him on the last one?

WEDNESDAY—FEBRUARY 29

THE GREAT WAR (BETWEEN CHRIST AND SATAN) AND HISTORY (Revelation 12:7–17)

No matter how messy or how out of control it seems, human history does not happen in a vacuum (empty space or time). There is a story behind human history, a struggle between two very different principles (important rules). We are talking about the great controversy (war between Christ and Satan). Only with that background can we begin to really understand human history and what it all means.

How do Revelation 12:7–17; Job 2:1, 2; Isaiah 14:12–14; Genesis 3:15; Ephesians 6:12; and Romans 16:20 help us to understand world history?

Satan is real. The battle is real. And only at the Cross was Satan defeated, letting all know that he would be destroyed for sure.

“Heaven watched with great sadness and shock Christ hanging upon the cross. . . . Yet there stood men, formed in the image of God, joining to crush out the life of His only-begotten Son. What a sight for the heavenly universe! . . .

“Satan’s angels and agents joined and worked with evil men in leading the people to believe that Christ was the worst sinner of all and to make people hate Him. . . .

“But Satan saw that his secret plan was exposed and torn away. His rulership was laid open before the unfallen angels and before the heavenly universe. He had shown himself as a murderer. He caused the blood of the Son of God to flow down from the cross. By doing this, Satan had uprooted [pulled] himself from the sympathies and hearts of the heavenly beings. . . . The last connection [tie] of sympathy between Satan and the heavenly world was broken.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pages 760, 761.

Why was Satan not destroyed then?

“The angels did not understand all that was involved in the great controversy [war]. The principles were to be more fully shown later. And for the sake of man, Satan’s life must be continued. Both men and angels must understand the sharp difference between the Prince of light and the prince of darkness. Each person

must choose whom he will serve.”
—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 761.

What the Bible teaches, and Ellen White, too, is that events here on earth are connected with (tied to) this war. This is the great controversy (war) between Christ and Satan. This controversy forms the background for everything that happens on earth and in human history. Everything is framed by this great controversy. But the good news is that, after the Cross, Satan’s defeat was guaranteed. And this controversy will end. With it all the pain and suffering and violence and fear will end too.



At the cross, Satan showed himself as a murderer.

THURSDAY—MARCH 1

THE CROSS IN HISTORY (2 Corinthians 5:17–19)

Have you ever noticed that world history is divided by one event? That event was not the rise or fall of some major world empire, as one would expect. It was not the discovery of a new continent. Instead, world history has been

divided by the birth of a single traveling preacher living in a lesser (smaller) part of the giant Roman Empire. Thinking about the thousands upon thousands of Jews born at this time, it is even more surprising that this one birth, among so many, should be the one event that has divided world history into its two largest time periods.

That birth is of Jesus.

Thinking about God and history, we can better appreciate the very important gift of salvation. The Cross tells us that by forgiving us and making us His children, God has opened up a new future for us. It is a future in which we no longer need to struggle along with the great guilt of our past or of our personal history. This guilt has been removed by Jesus, who “suffered the things we should have suffered. He took on himself the pain that should have been ours” (Isaiah 53:4, NIV).

The whole doctrine (teaching) of salvation can be shown in this one sentence: God cancels our hopeless history and in its place puts His history. Through Jesus, the history of being slaves to sin is ended in our lives. Through Him, the sins of the past should not come up to accuse, torment, and mock (make fun of) us. Our personal history, which would judge each one of us as guilty, is replaced with Jesus’ perfect history. So, in Him we find freedom from our past and the promise of a wonderful future. At the Cross, the Lord guaranteed that, whatever our history or whatever happened in world history, a new and glorious future is waiting for us and the world.

What is 2 Corinthians 5:17–19 saying that Jesus did for all people? How has this event changed human history?

Our sins have been put upon the shoulders of a Lord who willingly died under a load of human guilt and gave us salvation. And His promised ending to human history will give us eternal history with the Author of history. The future of every person is involved. The second coming of Christ will be sure to come. Both the Old and New Testaments promise a “new heaven and a new earth.”

If you have accepted Christ, how should your future be different, knowing that your past will not be used to judge you as guilty, no matter how much you deserve to be judged as guilty?



All world history is divided by one event: the birth of Jesus.

FRIDAY—MARCH 2

ADDITIONAL STUDY: “The Bible is the oldest and the most complete history that people have. It came fresh from the fountain of eternal truth.

And throughout that history, God has guided and protected its purity. . . . Only in the Bible do we find a true story of the beginning of nations. Only in the Bible are we given a history of humans, unspoiled by pride or negative opinions.

“In the course of human history the growth of nations and the rise and fall of empires seem to depend on human leadership. The shaping of events seems to be influenced by human power, ambition, or plans. But in the Bible the curtain is drawn back. And we see behind, above, and through all the events of human interests, desires, and plans. But God is always silently, patiently working out His own will and plans.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Education*, page 173.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

① For many years, thinkers and Bible teachers have debated the difficult issues (problems) of God’s foreknowledge (knowledge in advance) and human free will. Many have seen the two as completely separate. They argue that we do not have free will or that God does not know the future. But why are both those positions wrong? What proof do we have in the Bible that we do have free will? What proof do we have that God does know the future? The truth must be that, even with our free will, God knows future events before they happen. Why is there no

conflict (disagreement) between God’s foreknowledge and the choices that are freely made by humans?

② One of Satan’s roughest attacks is on Daniel 2. This is because this chapter gives proof of God being in heaven. After all, what stronger foundation can you have for faith than something as solid and unchangeable as world history? Part of Satan’s attack is to use historians to argue that Daniel 2 was written about 165 B.C. They also say that Daniel 2 was written long after many of the events foretold in it had already happened. But this argument is destroyed by the prophecy itself. How could Daniel so perfectly have foretold the break-up of Rome into the nations of modern Europe? This break-up did not happen until more than 500 or 600 years after 165 B.C. If a wonderful prophecy like that required God’s foreknowledge, why not then trust the Bible for what it says, instead of accepting a view that is proven untrue by the prophecy itself? The whole point of the late dating of Daniel is to try to steal from it its power to tell the future. As we can see, this late dating is a terrible failure!

SUMMARY: No matter how messy world history seems to be, the Lord is working out His purposes. And human history will end with the glorious second coming of Jesus.